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Published in:
Ethnic And Racial Studies

DOI:
10.1080/01419870.2018.1515442

Publication date:
2019

Ethnic and Racial Studies

ISSN: 0141-9870 (Print) 1466-4356 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20

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To cite this article: Bo Zhang, Peter Druijven & Dirk Strijker (2019) Hui family migration in Northwest China: patterns, experiences and social capital, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 42:12, 2008-2026, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2018.1515442

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1515442

ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES
2019, VOL. 42, NO. 12, 2008–2026
https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1515442

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Hui family migration in Northwest China: patterns, experiences and social capital

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ABSTRACT

Based on an extensive questionnaire survey in three cities in Northwest China, this article identifies the factors influencing the sole, couple and family migration of Han and Hui. We find that Han migrants are more utility-oriented and tend to circulate among different places in order to maximize their utility. Hui migrants are more likely to seek opportunities to settle in destinations with their families. They rely on Hui communities and dedicate themselves to creating networks and accumulating social capital for their families. We suggest that the accumulation of bonding capital does not necessarily suggest the increase or decrease of bridging capital. Moreover, the ethnic community should be regarded neither in negative nor positive terms but rather as a coin with two sides, *pro and con*. The ethnic community is a vessel, which migrants can use for minimizing risks, improving livelihoods and fostering the settlement of families.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 21 December 2017; Accepted 14 August 2018

KEYWORDS Migration patterns; ethnic identity; social capital; bonding and bridging; ethnic community; Northwest China

Introduction: the story of Bai's family

During search for rural migrants as interviewees within the Xiaoxihu Region of Lanzhou in September of 2013, we met 28-year-old Bai and his wife in their small Tangsumo (Hui Muslim sweet bread) shop. Hailing from Dongxiang County, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture (Linxia), the Hui[1] couple had moved to this Hui community in 2010. When we asked why they had decided to work in Lanzhou, leaving their children behind, Bai said:

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> … You can barely plant anything in our hometown … no future to stay home … youngsters work and try to stay outside … My uncle's family stays here for over 20 years … here it is convenient for us, the food (Halal), mosques and being near other Hui … Making bread is a two person job … She has to come and help me … Children are too small (six and eight year old boys) …

The case of Bai's family vividly illustrates one possible migration pattern encountered by millions of Chinese families: couples depart for the city, leaving their children behind. When we consider that family relations indeed influence the mobility of family members in different ways (Root and De Jong 1991; Nivalainen 2004), the rationale for particular family members to move differs from the reasons compelling whole families to migrate. Past 20 years witness a growing concern of the internal migration in China; and yet, the complex role of family members in migration patterns and decision-making has not yet received sufficient attention by scholars (Choi and Peng 2016). Therefore, in order to shed light on this particular phenomenon, the present article explores three different migration patterns, namely, sole (moving alone), couple (moving with spouse) and family (moving with all family members). We first aim to understand what factors influence migration patterns of Han and Hui families in three cities in Northwest China (NWC).

China is delineated by its propaganda department as a unified multi-nationality state composed of the majority Han and other fifty-five ethnic minority groups. The Han people, as the largest ethnic group, are usually regarded as the "benchmark" in terms of social performances in Chinese society. In fact, most of the existing literature dealing with Chinese migration issues is focusing on Han rather than minorities. However, China's minorities are also involved in the huge demographic change. Many minorities move from rural to urban areas in pursuit of better livelihoods, but their ethnic identities continue to place them in marginalized positions in terms of employment discrimination, social exclusion and cultural conflict throughout the migration process (Hasmath 2014). The Hui, are usually seen as the offspring of the Arabian, Persian, Mongolian and central Asian Muslim businessmen who had travelled, settled and inter-married with local Chinese through the Silk Road in around tenth century under the unification of Islam (Gladney 2003). As the most mobile minority (Howell 2017), Hui represent a typical example of how the Chinese minority migrants cave living space for their families in cities.

In Bai's case, the best bet for the Hui couple to live successfully in the destination city is to work and stay within a Hui community. Minorities are usually less competitive in the formal job market when competing with Han (Wu 2014). The ethnic ties fostered within ethnic community not only promote group solidarity and offer psychological support, but they also provide minorities with basic living assistance, including accommodation and help with the job search (Li 2004). It seems that the ethnic community is of utmost importance to these minority migrants. In the current research, we then attempt to

contribute a more differentiated and nuanced understanding of the ethnic community through the personal experiences of migrants. Particularly, why are Hui communities important to Hui families? Do they benefit or are they entrapped in the Hui community? How do these Hui migrants and their families establish new networks and gain access to social networks in the Hui communities? We intend to analyse these questions through the lens of ethnic identity, social capital and experiences of migrants within Hui community.

Migration patterns as the result of circulation

The hypothesis of the inevitable family reunion in the migration process has been challenged continuously within the last 30 years through the appearance of new technologies. This is especially true for internal migration, where the cost of shuttling between the place of destination and origin is less expensive and arduous (i.e. lower travelling and cell phone costs, no visa needed). Nowadays, the barriers of time and distance no longer prevent migrants from maintaining connections between their society of origin and settlement destination. Circulation has now become the major characteristic of migration in most developing countries (Hugo 2014). A plethora of research on circular migration reaches back to the 1970s (among others, Zelinsky 1971; Skeldon 1977; Hugo 1982). Despite the manifold criteria and domains in the definition of circular migration, the concept of circulation conveys the essence of migration as family-based, temporary and nonlinear (Skeldon 2012).

On the basis of net cost–benefit calculations that largely adhere to human capital factors, rational choice theory emphasizes the utility maximization of migrants (Haug 2008). Migration patterns are mirrored as the rational arrangement of family members grounded on the idea of family utility maximization. Furthermore, the theory of new economic of labour migration (NELM) stipulates that circulation encourages the flow and exchange of resources among family members expressly to minimize potential risk (e.g. natural disasters and deficient markets) (Massey et al. 1993). In this sense, family networks become significant resources that produce reciprocity support and long-lasting social capital in the event of unemployment, or in the case of accidents (Ryan 2011). Social networks are the core of migrants' support systems and contribute to the concept of circulation. In practice, especially at destinations, migrants have access to different types of assistance, such as financial help, accommodation and job information through social networks (Ryan et al. 2009). Technological advancements now allow migrants to keep in touch with families and friends at very low cost and without physical movements. This has led to the transformation and reinforcement of multiple related local networks at migrant destinations and the depopulation and decay of the villages (Skeldon 2012; Gao et al. 2018). Circular migration is

gradually evolving from a rural-based to an urban-based system as migrants increasingly spend their time in urban destinations (Skeldon 2010).

In China, the shift of the circular migration pattern from rural-based to a more urban-based one is usually driven by the intention to leave villages because of the low returns from the agricultural sector (Fan 2011). Many peasants working in the primary sector in the countryside sometimes cannot even make ends meet. Particularly in NWC, where the degree of agricultural mechanization is low, infertile land in combination with drought conditions has resulted in markedly low agricultural productivity. Compared to the Majority Han, the minorities usually live in the barren areas in Western China. They may have a strong intention of not returning to their impoverished hometown after living in the urban area for some time.

Social capital and ethnic communities in NWC

As for Bourdieu (1986, 248), "social capital is the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition". This definition implies that social capital is embedded in the social network and accumulated through time. For migrants, to invest time and resources in building network can be seen as the strategies, individual or collective, aiming at reproducing available relations (such as kinships and friendships) in the foreseeable future. Social relationships, as important resources that migrants possess, are unequally distributed in space. Besides, the amount of social capital of migrants depends on the size of the usable networks of relations they hold. Moreover, Bourdieu holds a reductionist viewpoint and sees social capital as convertible resources, which in some conditions can be reducible to economic capital eventually (Bourdieu 1986).

Adopting a functionalist approach, Coleman (1988, S98) writes social capital as "a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors". In this formulation, social capital is delineated as certain resources that are controlled by certain individuals in specific social structures. For migrants, families and communities can be seen as specific social structures that are usable to achieve their social goals in migration (Coleman 1990). Another merit of Coleman's narration is the conceptualization of closure. Closure means social capital is maintained and reproduced in rather closed networks to guarantee strong social norms. For instance, in his discussion of wholesale diamond business in Jewish community in New York, Coleman (1988) argues the diamond trade is not bounded by legal contract; instead, the transactions are secured by dense ties through relatively sealed social structures such as the family, community and religious organization. Any members who tend to cheat during the transactions would

be in facing of losing family, religious and community ties. Besides, both Bourdieu and Coleman suggest the rational action paradigm of social capital because the actions of individuals are always deemed as utility-oriented (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). However, Coleman emphasizes only the positive aspects of social capital and the ethnic communities by accentuating cooperative aspects, thus neglecting the rivalry aspects (Portes 1998).

Putnam (2007, 145) divides social capital into bonding capital, which is "ties to people who are like me in some important way", and bridging capital, which is "ties to people who are unlike me in some important way". In this sense, the ethnic community is formed through bonding capital with members of the same ethnic background. The development of bonding capital may lead to ethnic minorities' dependency on the dense networks and homogeneous labour market (Putnam 2000). Li (2004) following the argument of ethnic mobility entrapment (Wiley 1967), points out that widely available socio-economic opportunities may eventually be missed in the larger society because "the marginal status of minority communities affects the resourcefulness, which in turn constrains the effectiveness of social relations developed in such contexts" (Li 2004, 1778). In other words, bonding capital fostered in ethnic communities could come at the expense of disconnecting with mainstream society as it becomes increasingly difficult for migrants to "flee away" from their communities (Morales 2016). Migrants may, however, overcome the disadvantages of the bonding capital through establishing weak ties and developing bridging capital (Granovetter 1973). The ways in which migrants forge weak ties beyond the dense network of relatives and close friends is likely a complicated process, since different migrants will confront the problem in different ways and to a greater or lesser extent.

Putnam's (2007) observation confirms that strong bonding capital is usually positively associated with strong bridging capital, namely, migrants who have a good relationship with their group members are also more likely to develop friendships with others outside their own ethnic group. In fact, homogeneous ethnic contexts are conducive for migrants and their families to develop trust and solidarity and to further engage in civic society (Peucker and Ceylan 2017). In some western countries, ethnic community is gradually deployed through the practice of civic engagement as a solution to the issue of segregation (McGhee 2006). Moreover, it is noted that Putnam (2007) explicitly defines social capital as the social norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness built on the social networks. Community relations, as important social capital, are reflected through social reciprocities such as trusts, helps, friendship and degree of familiarity (Du and Li 2010). Thus, in a more general sense, what Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam share in common is that they all see the social capital as the collective asset which is generated through social relationships and mobilized by individuals and the social relationships are the vital resources embedded in the certain social structure (space).

Morris (2003) contends that migrants' ability to mobilize their social capital to access resources can depend largely on the migration-related policies and social attitudes of the host society. On the one hand, unlike some western countries where ethnic aggregations are widely discussed in social media, ethnic communities in China are rarely reported on by state media propaganda. The silence of public debate on ethnicity issues is considered to be a way to maintain "ethnic harmony (*Minzu Tuanjie*)". On the other hand, local authorities in China are keen to assist rural minorities in finding opportunities in cities as part of their vanity projects. Besides, the central government has granted the special governmental structure from the autonomous region (provincial level) to the autonomous county (village level) in accordance with the concentrations of minorities. Unlike other areas of China where the Han are usually predominant in terms of population, economy and culture, emphasis is placed on the distinctive cultural backgrounds of different minorities in NWC cities. These diverse cultural contexts can also be vital to migrants because social capital that derives from ethnic identity is highly context-specific (Bourdieu 1986).

Data and research settings

Our fieldwork was conducted in three cities in Gansu Province, NWC from August to November 2013, and both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected. We distribute questionnaires in thirteen street level administrations, in Lanzhou, Linxia and Gannan, respectively (see Zhang, Druijven, and Strijker 2017 for sampling details). We approached the interviewees using a random selection method in each street administration with the assistance of three groups of trained interviewers from the local universities. In total, 1,918 of 2,500 questionnaires comprise the final dataset; 582 questionnaires were dropped due to incomprehensible or inconsistent answers. We selected thirty-five respondents for in-depth interviews through both the random and snowball techniques; they are included in the questionnaires to keep consistent with quantitative analysis. These interviewees include five Han and five Hui in Lanzhou, six Han, seven Hui, and two Dongxiang in Linxia; five Han and five Hui in Gannan. We also interviewed eleven key informants. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured and conversational, with each interview lasting between 40 min and one hour. Questions focused on the migration patterns and migration experience of the interviewees in Hui communities.

Dependent variable

We have asked each interviewee, "Are you married?" and "Are you living with your spouse or children here?" We keep only the interview samples representing sole, couple and family migration, that is, 1,132 samples remain for

Table 1. Cross table of ethnic identity and migration patterns.

Migration patterns	Han (%)	Hui (%)
Sole	41.2	48.7
Couple	22.9	22.7
Family	35.9	28.6
Total	100	100
χ^2	8.383**	

**means $P < .01$ in two-tailed tests.

analysis. Table 1 presents the proportions and the significant differences between Han and Hui in terms of migration patterns.

Independent variables

Table 2 provides socio-demographic characteristics, employment and housing, and the social capital of the interviewees. We have asked the question, "How many local friends or relatives do you usually get in contact with (through phone, meet in person)?" to measure the number of local acquaintances. We have used six variables to measure the community relationships, namely *friendliness, help given, help received, trust, the degree of familiarity* and *communication frequency*. Each of the variables is measured through 5-point Likert scales. The results of Pearson Correlation tests indicate there is multicollinearity between these variables. We thereafter have conducted factor analyses to reduce the dimensions of the six variables into one variable representing community relationships.

The chi-square tests in (Table 2) illustrate significant differences between Han and Hui interviewees in terms of circulation, settlement intentions, hometown locations and destinations. Results showing a higher per cent of Hui interviewees as "undecided", indicates that minorities are generally hesitant, less determined and inconsistent in migration (Zhang, Druijven, and Strijker 2017). Compared to Han, it is easier for Hui interviewees to reunite with their families in the destinations because fewer per cent Hui have arrived from outside the Gansu province. Han respondents are relatively evenly distributed in the three destinations, while the Hui respondents are more aggregated within Lanzhou and Linxia.

What influence the migration patterns of Han and Hui in Northwest China?

Table 3 presents the results of multinomial regressions of Han and Hui. Concerning the **socio-demographic characteristics**, age and number of children are significant variables for Han, but not for Hui families. Specifically, the younger Han (<=45) are more likely to move as couples or families. The number of children is positively associated with couple and family migration

Table 2. Description of the independent variables.

Independent variables	Han (%)	Hui (%)	χ^2
Socio-demographic characteristics			
AGE			
<=25	17.1	18.7	
26–45	72.1	67.6	
>45	10.8	13.8	
GENDER			
Female	37.6	38.5	
Male	62.4	61.5	
EDUCATION			
Junior high and below	64.2	82.7	
Senior high and above	35.8	17.3	
NUMBER OF CHILDREN (Mean)	2.2	2.4	
Employment and Housing			
EMPLOYMENT TYPES			
Employee	63.7	76.5	
Self-employed	36.3	23.5	
INCOME (Unit: Yuan/month)			
<=2,000	42.6	50.6	
>2,000	57.4	49.4	
RENTING PRICE (Mean, Unit: Yuan/person/month)	187.6Y	216.1Y	
Social Capital			
TIME OF STAY			
<= 2 years	43.9	45.5	
>2 years	56.1	54.5	
NUMBER OF LOCAL ACQUAINTANCES	3.4	3.5	
Circulation			43.24**
Yes	22.2	27.7	
No	77.8	72.3	
Settlement Intentions			16.98**
Stay in the current city	35.0	36.3	
Returning home after earning money	30.9	29.9	
Transfer to another city	17.7	10.6	
Undecided	16.4	23.2	
Hometown Locations			73.99**
Within the city	53.1	58.8	
Outside the city, within the province	20.9	33.3	
Out of the province	26.1	7.9	
Destinations			38.86**
Lanzhou	33.1	36.0	
Gannan	30.7	15.6	
Linxia	36.1	48.4	
Number of the cases	537	595	

**Means $P < .01$ in two-tailed tests.

of Han. Compared to Hui, Han are described as more independent and autonomous and are less likely to leave family members behind (Zhang, Druijven, and Strijker 2018). It is noteworthy that Han can afford the higher cost of including more family members in the migration.

In the **employment and housing group**, both self-employed Han and Hui are positively related to couple and family migration compared to those who work as employees. As the Hui couple mentioned at the preamble, these self-employed are generally low-skilled and engaged in labour intensive small workshops; the best way for them to maximize efficiency is to work with

Table 3. Multinomial regression of sole, couple and family migration of the Han and Hui samples.

	Han				Hui			
	Couple		Family		Couple		Family	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Socio-demographic characteristics								
Age (Ref: >45)								
<=25	1.917**	0.574	1.312**	0.504	−0.238	0.459	−0.660	0.460
26–45	1.238**	0.462	0.753*	0.382	−0.455	0.341	−0.350	0.326
Gender (Ref: Female)								
Male	−0.086	0.258	0.130	0.251	−0.269	0.234	−0.104	0.227
Education (Ref: Senior high and above)								
Junior high and below	−0.003	0.273	−0.182	0.260	−0.575	0.306	−0.389	0.309
Number of the children	0.432*	0.189	0.356*	0.181	0.275	0.167	0.193	0.162
Employment and Housing								
Employee (Ref: self-employed)	−1.667**	0.318	−2.330**	0.300	−.756**	0.304	−1.315**	0.276
Income (Ref: >2,000)								
<=2,000	0.177	0.260	0.159	0.252	−0.371	0.236	0.130	0.228
Monthly rent	0.002	0.001	0.003**	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.003	0.001
Social capital								
Time of stay (Ref: >2 years)								
<=2 years	0.144	0.268	0.176	0.256	−0.415	0.239	−0.617**	0.233
Number of Local acquaintances	0.000	0.058	0.125**	0.052	−0.001	0.058	0.049	0.053
Community relations	0.115	0.124	−0.052	0.117	0.115	0.126	0.316**	0.122
Circulation (Ref: Yes)								
No	0.276	0.298	0.844**	0.318	−0.448	0.263	0.494	0.280
Settlement intentions (Ref: undecided)								
Stay in the current city	−1.047**	0.376	−0.996**	0.365	0.596*	0.310	0.677*	0.288
Return home after earning money	−0.398	0.374	−0.561	0.367	0.225	0.322	0.260	0.306
Transfer to another city	−0.964**	0.452	−0.429	0.426	0.680	0.415	0.170	0.415
Hometown (Ref: out of the province)								
Within the city	0.158	0.316	−0.120	0.299	0.562	0.440	1.040**	0.435
Outside the city. within the province	0.271	0.400	0.138	0.365	0.281	0.447	0.292	0.451
Destinations (Ref: Linxia)								
Lanzhou	−0.107	0.377	0.606	0.356	1.669**	0.425	1.147**	0.404
Gannan	−0.325	0.332	−0.188	0.335	0.478	0.418	−0.008	0.380
Model χ^2	191.544				140.798			
Pseudo R^2	0.300				0.211			
Number of the cases	537				595			

Note: The reference category is: sole.
*$P < .05$; **$P < .01$ in two-tailed tests.

their families. The monthly rent for Han migrants is positively related to move as a family but is insignificant to Hui migration patterns. A possible explanation for this could be that more members in the destination increase the accommodation cost. The cost may be affordable to Han but could be a heavy burden for Hui families, given the fact that the average housing cost for Hui (216.1Y/P/M) is higher than Han (187.6 Y/P/M).

Han and Hui families rely on different types of **social capital**. For Han, the number of local acquaintances is positively associated with family migration. For Hui, good community relations are positively associated with family migration. Furthermore, a longer stay at the destination is significantly co-

related to the probability of family migration of Hui. First, the social capital of Hui families may aggregate within the Hui communities while the social capital of Han families may not necessarily gather within the community but instead scatter in the receiving society. The community is essential not only for individual Hui migrants but is also vital for the other family members when they reunite with the pioneer migrants at the destinations. Second, the obtainment of social capital of Hui families may require times to accumulate while the social capital that Han families rely upon may be prepared prior to migration.

In regard to **settlement intentions**, Han migrants who are presently staying in the current city or transferring to another city are less likely to bring their families, that is to say, the settling intention of individual Han migrants does not indicate their families' long-term settlement plan. During the interviews, many Han respondents informed us that they had adapted a strategy of circulation (not limited to one destination) in order to pursue a higher utility. Remarks include, for instance, "There are not many jobs; you finish what is in your hand then you are likely to move or get laid off" (Han, male, 27, Gannan) and "I am not trying to integrate … you practice your skills and earn some money, then you go" (Han, male, 30+, Gannan); and "Any place as long as I can make money" (Han, male, 30+, Gannan). Those who do not circulate, however, are more likely to bring their families with them.

Many Han migrants have arrived from origins of higher socio-economic development than at their destinations, suggesting better living conditions and employment opportunities for family members and better education resources for their under-aged children at their hometowns. Relying on their relatively higher personal qualities of professional skills or education levels, Han migrants are more likely to be the utility-oriented "gold diggers" who attempt to take advantage of circulating among destinations rather than settling permanently in current cities. On the contrary, Hui migrants' intention to stay increases the likelihood of couple and family migration, which also confirms our observation that many Hui interviewees who were separated from family members claimed that they were expecting to reunite sooner or later with their families at the destinations. The Hui minorities are usually distributed among the remote countryside, where socio-economic conditions are usually worse than at their destinations. Different from Han, their purpose of migration is to escape from villages and settle down in cities.

The significance of **hometown** location suggests that migration distance may be important to Hui families because those who had come from the rural areas of the destinations were more likely to bring their families compared to those who had come from outside the province. It seems that the social capital accrued from Hui identity weakens as the distance between destination and place of origin increases. Moreover, Hui couple and family

migration prefer Lanzhou compared to Linxia in terms of **destination**. However, this does not necessarily suggest that Hui emphasize livelihood issues above considerations of cultural adaptation. Interestingly from our observations, there is little need for Hui to adapt to the cultural differentiations in Lanzhou because Hui always aggregate within Hui communities and only maintain limited interactions with the host society, as long as they can survive with their family members.

Entrapment or not? A qualitative interpretation of social capital and ethnic community

As complementary and essential material, the qualitative analysis allows us to examine in detail the reasons why the Hui community is important to Hui migrants and their families. Many Han migrants told us their homes of origin during the fieldwork, but we seldom were informed about the ethnic group to which they belong. The Han generally do not consider themselves as a subgroup of Chinese society, and "Chinese" and "Han" are usually used synonymously (Harrell 1990). Moreover, the Han rely primarily on the clan and fellows who come from the same place as themselves rather than from an ethnic Han group to build social networks. It is unlikely that Han migrants would feel that they belong to a Han community due to the rootlessness of Han identity as perceived by Han migrants (Zhang, Druijven, and Strijker 2018).

Bonding capital, ethnic networks and the entrapment experiences of Hui families in Hui communities

Su came to Lanzhou in 2009. He bought the cheap daily necessities from his fellow Hui and sold them in the Hui community as a street peddler. His wife sold chicken meat and eggs with the wife of his Hui friend. The couple replied on and benefits from the dense networks Su had established before migration. However, he was ambivalent about his relationships with other Hui and was highly cautious when he made a complaint about his business.

> It is not easy for Hui people to live in the city, we stay together and many problems will be solved … I do not always get the best bargain when I stock goods from him … but I do not want to let him down … after all, he helped me when I wanted to stay … (however), I know I am Hui and I never forget it … I have lots of (Hui) friends here, I do not need to get more (Han friends) … I do put my Hui fellows first when I do business … (Hui, male, 28, peddler, 4-year stay, August 2013).

Many interviewees fell into the dilemma like Su. On the one hand, they thought they should gain more profits when associated with other Hui. On the other hand, they were reluctant to get a bargain because they felt embarrassed and did not want to let their Hui fellows down, especially since the

giver and the receiver were in different social position. For instance, "*You get what you are paid, you should not complain because at least you are given a job here" (male, Dongxiang, 30±, Linxia)*. Li (2004) argues that strong ties often imperceptibly impose values of loyalty and obligation, thereby resulting in a possibly low-paying position of the migrants. In this vein, the ethnic resources that migrants bear can become a burden rather than a merit in the ethnic community. The strong ties with ethnic fellows could put actors in a disadvantaged position in society (Kelly and Lusis 2006). Bourdieu (1986) suggests that the cultural capital that migrants possess can transform into other forms of capital. However, he does not discuss whether the process of transformation from one type of capital to another may result in a deduction of the capital. The deduction is the price that many migrants have to pay in order to rely on ethnic bonding capital.

According to Su's comments, he was both major source and intermediary of job information for his family. Coleman (1990) calls the situation "network closure" to describe people like Su and his wife, who only rely on their existing networks and do not establish new relationships. A similar condition also applies to Bai's wife. When we asked Bai why he and his wife had come together to Lanzhou, his strong and aggressive reply revealed that he took the leading role in the marriage. Indeed, male migrants usually answered questions, even when both man and wife appeared during the interviews. Although the last 30 years has witnessed a trend of egalitarian development of gender roles in urban China, rural citizens still strongly embody the traditional patriarchal norms (Hu 2016). Despite evidence from eastern and coastal cities indicating that traditional gender norms have loosened due to the market demand for female labour (Fan 2011), the market economy in NWC has barely developed and traditional norms still dominate. A Hui female LDZG from Xihu Street in Lanzhou disappointingly observed that.

> Here you do not see the specific need for female labourers in the job market; many women have followed their husbands as the company or assist but not the reverse … you will be looked upon if you are following your wife, they call it *Chi Ruan Fan de* (the sponge-off) … their (wives) choices for jobs are extremely limited … we are not encouraged to *pao tou lou mian* (work in public).

The rural Hui respondents expressed the ideology of "*Nan zhu wai, Nv zhu nei* (Men are breadwinners, women are homemakers)" which only varies in degree. The spouses who reverse each other's role normally face high social pressure. If the demand for female labour in the job market in destination cities is low, female spouses will have to seek alternatives to support the family. However, it may be difficult for Hui family members to obtain the social capital out of the communities (number of local acquaintances is uncorrelated with migration patterns). Many Hui women tended either to be their husbands' assistants, like Bai's wife, or they relied on the ethnic ties their

husbands have developed in the communities, like Su's wife. The implication here is that husbands have a strong influence on the ethnic networks of their wives. In other words, a gender dimension of entrapment may be imposed on female Hui in Hui communities. They may also face the loss of weak ties, which are useful for exploring new sources and information (Granovetter 1973). The Hui communities are also significant resources for the children of Hui families. We can now continue our conversation with Bai about his children he left behind in his hometown.

> … they will come when they are 12 or 13, when they can calculate and write … they should *Xue Jing* (learn Islamic classics) and do business, going to the school does not help … we are Hui and this is the way for generations and should be respected … .

Despite efforts by Chinese authorities to popularize the nine-year compulsory education, it is common for rural Hui children to drop out of school at an earlier age (Lu et al. 2016). The reason, as Mackerras (2003) argues, is that Muslim parents generally place greater emphasis on fostering their children's survival skills rather than providing them with a formal education to improve their livelihoods. Hui children who quit school usually join their parents at the destinations at a young age. Although some children are sent to the *madrassah* (*jing tang jiao yu* in Chinese) in the mosques, many start to work in Hui communities. In fact, many Hui respondents take it for granted that they should bring their children as long as "*they can recognize words and know how to calculate*". The cultural behaviour may be inherited from the Muslim tradition in many Middle East countries where the youths are obligated to assist the family business (Fernea 1991). However, this obligation tends to exacerbate Hui families' dependence on communities because Hui children as the child labours could only have access to the job market within Hui communities. Besides, it may lead to the alienation of under-aged children from the interactions with the other groups outside the community because they barely have any opportunities to develop the bridging capital with the others during their childhood and youthhood.

The other side of the coin, Hui communities as shelters for Hui families to settle down

Chen came to Lanzhou with his wife in 2010. At first, the couple were recruited by the local government agent through the project called "poverty alleviation" and worked at a construction site. After the completion of the construction job in 2012, they became unemployed. Unfortunately, for Chen and his wife, the local government did not have subsequent institutional arrangement after the construction work had been completed. He told us how he got the current jobs for himself and his wife.

> … When we finished our jobs I did not want to return … but I did not know what to do because I know nobody in Lanzhou … I met Boss Ma when I did *salat* in Xijingdonglu mosques … He asked me to come to his construction site to do the old work and my wife did the cooking for workers … I met lots of friends when doing *salat* and some of them became good friends … We will pick up our children when we have a stable foothold here and when they are a little older … (Hui, Male, 26, construction worker, 3-year stay, September 2013).

Chen mentioned that Boss Ma had provided jobs for him and his wife because they are all Muslims and had done *salat* in a local mosque. In this case, the connection between the migrants and the job provider represents ethnic-specific bonding capital. In fact, migrants' ethnic identity is recognized as cultural capital which can be used to generate profits (not necessarily but can be reducible to economic profits) through social networks (Bourdieu 1986). Like Chen, when the social resources that migrants possess in the destination cities are low, they spontaneously switch to the places where their cultural endowment is recognized and allows them to be involved in the ethnic networks (Li 2004). The Hui community, in this sense, provides members with a natural sense of trust and solidarity through the recognition of identity. In fact, many Hui migrants relied on the network of their co-ethnics based on mutual trust and group solidarity when they were totally unfamiliar with the place and the people in the destinations.

Throughout the interviews, Chen made an interesting distinction between "friends" and "good friends". Kelly and Lusis (2006) suggest the networks should not be seen as equally distributed but rather that some networks are clearly more valuable than others. Bourdieu (1986) discusses how people from the same ethnic group may have access to networks differently because of the different knowledge and resources they possess. Within a Hui community, it is necessary to distinguish specific ethnic networks as "good friends" who can help effectively, and to identify other, more generalized networks, as "friends" who may not be very helpful. In fact, the latter "friend" network is more likely to lead to group rivalry than solidarity.

Ryan et al. (2008) provide an analogous case on the prevailing idea that "Poles do not help each other" in Britain because of the job competition in Polish communities. However, none of our respondents made similar complaints during the interviews. We suggest that the underlying reason is because the generation of bonding capital occurs not merely in the ethnic aspect but also in the religious aspect. Ma's case further explains the relationship between these two aspects.

> I remembered that the first thing I did when I arrived at Lanzhou was to find a Hui community and mosque, you know, it means (halal) food and shelter … People (Hui) from here are always helpful, they help me to get to know the place … I was alone when I first came here, I was not prepared for this

> because I knew nobody in Lanzhou before I moved … (Hui, male, around 40, a small restaurant owner, 7-year stay, August 2013).

For Hui people, the Hui identity to some extent can be generalized as their religious identity (Gladney 2003). As indicated by many respondents, religious activities such as visiting the mosque can increase social capital resources (Maselko, Hughes, and Cheney 2011). Most Hui migrants have chosen to pay higher monthly rent (Table 2) in order to live in a Hui community, and not only to be closer to their ethnic fellows but also to be in close proximity to mosques. When Ma mentioned "food and shelter", he literally meant he was offered free food and shelter. It was confirmed to us on many occasions during the fieldwork that common sense compelled the Hui to provide free food and shelter for other Muslims (not limited to Hui) if they were in need. In fact, keeping a good community relationship is, in another respondent's words, the "*will of Allah*". Although there are many differences among Hui in terms of religious sects and practices (for instance, the Qadim, called Laojiao and Ikhwan, called Xinjiao in NWC, see Zhang, Druijven, and Strijker 2018 for details), in a more general sense, religion can play an effective role in easing rivalry and promoting group solidarity in Hui communities. In other words, the bonding capital among Hui migrants is not only built on shared ethnic identity but also on shared religion.

Conclusion and discussion

Drawing from the results of our survey in NWC, this article has discussed the factors influencing sole, couple and family migration of Han and Hui families respectively using quantitative analysis. We have also explored the reasons why community relations are important to Hui families through an in-depth qualitative questionnaire/survey. The quantitative analysis has allowed us to draw an overall and general image, but it nevertheless has two distinct drawbacks. First, it can neglect certain salient details and heterogeneous information. Second, since social capital and ethnic communities are all considered to be dynamically changed during the migration process, these may not be fully reflected in cross-sectional data. Our use of qualitative analysis, therefore, picks up where quantitative analysis has left off, by enhancing our ability to articulate the family migration process in a more dynamic way, using insights gained from in-depth interviews.

One of our main findings is that the settlement intentions of individual Han migrants do not necessarily indicate their family settling plan. Compared to Hui, Han migrants are more utility-oriented and tend to circulate among different places in order to maximize their utility. The Hui migrants, on the contrary, are indeed seeking opportunities to settle with family members at the destinations. This tendency has required us to examine the migration of

Han families from a more dynamic perspective, and to study Hui families within a more localized context. Whereas for Hui migrants and their families, social capital may be more important than human capital (personal qualities). Besides, social capital should play a more important role in the settlement process of Hui families. NELM and network theory may be more effective in explaining the arrangement of Hui migrants' family members. In other words, compared to Han families, it may not be necessary for Hui migrants to adapt to the cultural context of destination cities because they usually aggregate in Hui communities upon arrival at their destinations. The results of the regression in the Hui group highlight the importance of community relations for Hui families. Different from Han migrants, Hui migrants rely on Hui communities to create their networks and accumulate social capital for their families. The Hui community, if not an entrapment, is definitely the vital resource for Hui families.

A wide array of policies and local regulations have in recent years been implemented by Chinese authorities in order to stimulate economic development in urban areas, but this has been achieved at the cost of the livelihoods of many migrants, especially minorities and their families. The Hui community, as an informal agent, plays the essential role of fostering the settlement of Hui migrants and their families. It would nevertheless be prudent over the long-term to establish relevant policies on how to formally and institutionally guarantee the livelihoods of minority migrants in NWC.

However, there may also be a dark side to the ethnic community. Not only may the community be a pitfall for individual ethnic migrants, but it may also be a trap for other family members as well. This is especially true for the Hui women and under-aged children because they are always the followers. In fact, the entrapment phenomenon is not unique to China; it also appears among minority communities of immigrants in other parts of the world (Li 2004). However, the Hui women in China may not only face the constraints from their husbands and Hui communities, but they may also encounter pressures from mainstream society because they usually move to cities in NWC in which the social environment is relatively conservative. A more fundamental reason for the dark side of the Hui community could be because the community itself is isolated from the larger society. To build a more inclusive job market in the overall society, and find a way to promote inter-group communication, may help minority migrants and their families avoid becoming entrapped in Hui communities.

The main revelation gained from our in-depth interviews is that the accumulation of bonding capital does not necessarily suggest an increase or decrease of bridging capital. Thus, "ethnic community" should neither be seen as a negative nor positive term but rather as a coin with two sides, *pro and con*. The ethnic community, rather than its dark side being a pitfall, can be potentially used as an agent by migrants to minimize the risk of

unemployment, improve their livelihoods and foster the settlement of their families. Moreover, the relationship between group solidarity and group rivalry need not suggest a waxing and waning, but can instead co-exist in the ethnic communities. The dense networks of ethnic fellows in the community may lead to in-group competition and disadvantage the members among them (Ryan et al. 2008). However, our study suggests that the shared religion among the ethnic group members may actually be a useful intermediary for easing rivalry and promoting group solidarity in ethnic communities. Furthermore, the analysis set out here indicates that migrants and their families do not necessarily slip into their social networks prior to the migration and settlement process. The reason is because the bonding capital based on certain religious identity and ethnicity can be generated between strangers through trust and shared identity. From a theoretical perspective, it would nevertheless be beneficial in future studies to delve more deeply into the relationship between bonding and bridging capital.

Note

1. Hui includes Hui and Dongxiang. We put them into one group because they are identical ethnic groups with shared religion (Islam), geographical locations, history and closely similar cultural backgrounds. In fact, they identify themselves as the same ethnic group.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This paper is supported by the National Science Foundation of China [grant number 41630635 and 41801128].

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